



Specialist Five Richard Friend



The Jeep SPC/5 Friend was riding in during the ambush of 21 May 1967.

order of march, right behind the Engineers' 2 ½ ton truck. Just kilometers outside of Gia Ray, the convoy rolled through the village of Suoi Cat.

On the far side of the village, the convoy was ambushed by what later was determined to be a North Vietnamese Army (NVA) battalion-sized element. The extremely intense ambush was over a kilometer long, with enemy on both sides of the road, firing machine guns, rocket propelled grenades, and 57mm anti-tank guns. The lead tank hit a mine and threw a track, stopping most of the convoy within the kill zone of the ambush. The jeep driver, Specialist George Heppen, decided to race out of the kill zone, while Friend and another occupant returned fire. The jeep sped 500 yards, but while trying to pass the disabled tank, it was struck by a recoilless rifle round. The jeep veered off the road and struck a tree. Friend was thrown from the passenger's seat and struck the same tree, breaking his nose.

As Friend shook off the mental haze caused by his collision with the tree, he found himself in the middle of an extremely violent and well-prepared ambush, with no helmet, and no weapon. His only solace came from the three-foot-grass, in which his jeep rested. Friend crawled to the road and saw an APC 100 meters down the road. He leapt to his feet and, in a crouched position, ran toward the APC. He quickly saw two NVA soldiers behind a dirt mound. Strangely, the NVA pointed their weapons at Friend, but did not fire.

Now just 50 meters from the APC, Friend saw an NVA soldier running toward the APC carrying a rifle and satchel charge. Friend stated, "I knew he had a rifle, he wasn't using it, and I needed it." As the two adversaries ran toward the APC with very different goals in mind, other enemy soldiers fired on Friend, but he still managed to close on the NVA soldier with the satchel charge. Friend felt a blow to his chest as an NVA bullet struck a box of M16 ammo in his breast pocket.

As the NVA soldier neared the APC, he dropped his shoulder, sliding the satchel charge off and crept toward the APC. Friend reached for his belt and extracted his hunting knife, closed the distance and drove the hunting knife in the NVA's back. Friend, still with no weapon, climbed on top of the disabled APC and into the safety of its armored crew compartment, only to find everyone inside wounded.

For his actions during the ambush, Richard Friend was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

In the early morning hours of Sunday, March 21, 1967, a supply convoy from the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment was going from the Gia Ray Rock Quarry to Saigon. Four Engineers from the 595th Engineer Company (Light Equipment) joined the convoy with the hope of locating some much needed repair parts. The convoy contained eight Armored Personnel Carriers (APC) and one tank from the 11th Cavalry Regiment, as well as the Engineers' Jeep and 2 ½ ton truck.

Specialist Five Richard Friend rode shotgun in the jeep, positioned 6th in the



LTG Bruce Palmer talks with SP5 Friend, after presenting him the Distinguished Service Cross.